New Nouveau Brunswick CANADA

News Release

Communications New Brunswick

N.B. Human Rights Commission

Op-ed / Further work necessary in promoting human rights (04/07/16)

NB 806

July 16, 2004

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following op-ed article was issued today by Alanna Palmer, chair of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission.

FREDERICTON (CNB) - "In my first full week on the job as Chair of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, I was struck by two issues that highlight the commission's need to continue its work in promoting human rights.

The first issue occurred on Canada Day when flyers that were possibly discriminatory were discovered on Fredericton's green.

The second recent issue concerned the University New Brunswick's delay in accommodating a student with a visual impairment.

The media attention and public outcry surrounding these stories underscores the common sense nature of human rights legislation. People know a violation when they see it. It offends their sensibilities about what is right and fair.

Without commenting on the merits of these specific cases, the New Brunswick *Human Rights Act*, in Section 6, prohibits the publication of any material that indicates discrimination against a group of people.

Over the last five years, formal complaints relating to the publication of material has represented less than one per cent of our caseload. But this statistic understates the impact of these cases. Publication of such material affects a much larger number of people than other incidents of discrimination, precisely because it is intended to have a public impact. It can create a poisoned environment that has a broad impact.

The act also prohibits, in Section 5, discrimination because of physical disability in the provision of services. Service providers have a duty to accommodate a person with a disability to the point of undue hardship. Complaints on the grounds of disability make up about half of the commission's workload.

The New Brunswick Human Rights Commission is able to investigate complaints about discriminatory publicity and practices. We have staff that can investigate and conciliate such complaints. If there is sufficient evidence, and a complaint cannot be settled, a Human Rights Board of Inquiry may be

appointed to hold a hearing. If it finds that there was a violation of the *Human Rights Act*, it may order various remedies, including monetary compensation. The focus is to remedy the harm and settle the conflict instead of simply punishing the offender.

The commission has a variety of educational resources that are designed to counter discrimination. There are guidelines on the duty to accommodate, teacher's guides with several activities designed to promote tolerance and two video series that deal with aspects of prejudice. Our website has a page specifically devoted to countering racism, as well as information about prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination. Commission members and staff also conduct workshops and training.

I look forward to my term as Chair of the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, working with all New Brunswickers to champion the cause of human rights."

04/07/16

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04/07/16

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